



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

A Report to the 26th District

Spring 2002



Representative Pat Lantz

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Dear Friends,

It feels so strange to write this legislative report. All of my end-of-session reports to you in years past described our community's struggle for greater fairness on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The message was always: we face an uphill battle against the Department of Transportation and powerful lobbyists, but we must not give up the fight for what we know is right.

I can hardly contain my pride in our community as I write: we saved public control over the bridge and hundreds of millions of dollars because we won the battles we were told we could never win. As you'll see inside, it was definitely not a complete victory. We couldn't stop the railroad, but we put it on a better track by getting a far, far better bridge agreement than we have seen before, or would ever see again.

I wish all the legislative news was as good. Unfortunately, as you know, the Legislature faced a \$1.5 billion budget deficit this year. Similar deficits in the 1980s and 1990s (before I was your representative) triggered massive sales and business tax increases. We did not repeat that mistake! We addressed the deficit with no general tax increase!

To avoid a tax increase, however, we had to lower spending to a full one-half billion dollars below the I-601 spending limit. In the budget story inside, you'll see that some of the budget cuts were very painful.

You'll also see information inside on the regional and statewide transportation plans passed by the Legislature (we got the public vote we wanted!), new policies to help businesses, and progress on helping parents to protect their children against Internet pornography. Please take a look. If you have any questions or comments on these – or any other issue – please don't hesitate to contact me.

This is my last report to you for at least seven months, so let me take this opportunity to say thank you for all your suggestions and support. I am incredibly proud of our 26th District community, and more honored than words can express to be your representative.

Sincerely,

Pat Lantz

Tacoma Narrows Bridge

I still cringe when I think about the legislative juggernaut that nearly forced the Department of Transportation's (DOT) bridge plans into law: The dangerous plan to give United Infrastructure absolute control over the bridge and bridge tolls for generations. Expensive private financing. No accountability for decisions. Adding highway costs to bridge tolls.

The Legislature came within an inch of forcing all this upon us – in addition to putting tolls on a bridge we have already paid for once. We barely blocked Senate plans with these components. What passed instead was the compromise forged in the House of Representatives.

This compromise still puts tolls on the existing bridge (which I opposed!) to finance construction of the second span, and it still fails to commit state funding to buy down future tolls, but it gives us huge wins on the other goals we fought so hard to achieve. When the dust settled, we won on:

- Continued public ownership of the bridge.
- Public financing – which will save us \$400 to \$700 million.
- Public oversight – to ensure that private profit doesn't trump public needs.
- Public accountability for decisions
- State payment of maintenance costs – saving about \$100 million.
- State payment of costs for the approaches – saving us \$39 million.

Hardly *anyone* (and certainly not United Infrastructure!) thought our communities could win on these issues. But we did win.

Is this the end of the Narrows Bridge issue? Definitely not. We must continue our fight to get more state funding for the bridge in order to buy down tolls. Some people say we'll never win our fight for additional state funding. But we've heard nay-sayers before. Let's prove them wrong again!

The bridge agreement averted a disastrous outcome and agreed with Peninsula positions on most issues.



Statewide transportation package

Local residents asked me to stand up for the public's right to vote on any proposed transportation taxes. I did. I opposed a Senate proposal to enact a transportation plan and taxes without a public vote, and supported the House proposal to put a 10-year \$7.7 billion transportation plan on the November ballot. Our House proposal passed.

The transportation plan I voted to put on the ballot includes several investments in Pierce and Kitsap County priorities, including:

- HOV lanes on SR 16 from I-5 to the Narrows Bridge
- Four new auto ferries, and two additional passenger-only ferries
- A new Southworth ferry terminal and Southworth-Seattle run.
- SR 3 improvements to relieve congestion near the Bremerton ferry terminal.

Funding for the \$7.7 billion plan would come from:

- 9-cent per gallon gas-tax increase (5 cents in 2003, 4 cents in 2004)
- 1% sales tax hike on new and used vehicles in 2003
- 30% increase in truck weight fees

According to the Department of Transportation, the gas-tax hike would cost the average motorist less than \$50 a year.

26th District News

Regional funding plan

In addition to sending a statewide transportation plan to the ballot, the Legislature passed a Regional plan



that allows voters in Pierce, King and Snohomish counties to approve additional transportation projects – and revenues. Importantly: Money raised locally would stay local. I proposed an amendment to exempt Peninsula communi-

ties from any taxes that voters raise through the regional plan, since we face tolls others won't pay. Unfortunately, my amendment was not adopted.

Painful as these budget cuts are, they were necessary to avoid a tax increase. I'm also relieved we avoided even worse budget cuts that were proposed early in the session. Specifically:

- The teacher salary initiative remains fully funded
- The class-size reduction initiative remains fully funded.
- We avoided threatened budget cuts to nursing homes.
- We protected the Children's Health Insurance Program.
- Funding for local health districts was preserved.

Overall, the revised budget is a full half billion dollars below the I-601 spending limit and has the least growth of any state budget – Democrat or Republican – in over 40 years. As someone who strongly believes we must work harder to improve government efficiency, I was also pleased that the government performance audits I supported are required by the new budget.

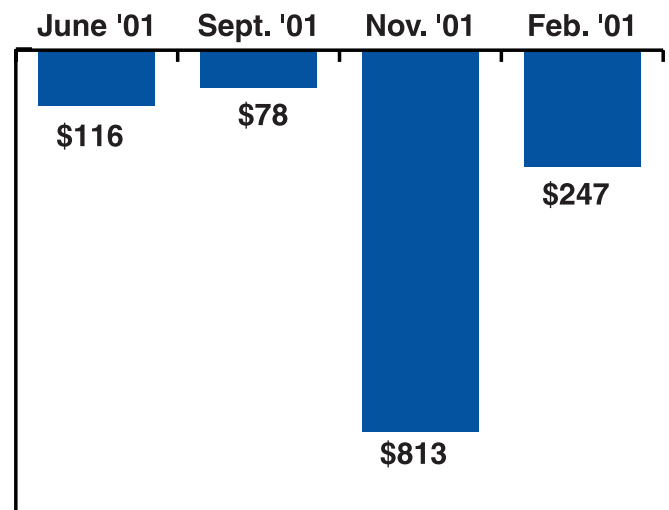
The budget challenge

The September 11th terrorist attacks and a slowing economy collided with much higher state costs for school enrollments, prisons, and health care to create a \$1.5 billion deficit. The good news is that we addressed the problem without raising taxes. However, we did have to make severe budget reductions, including:

- Cutting \$54.1 million from higher education.
- Cutting \$91 million from selected K-12 programs.
- Cutting \$95 million from DSHS services.
- Laying off over 900 state workers.
- Denying all state workers a cost of living adjustment.
- Reducing state employee and teacher health benefits.
- Cutting \$25 million from natural resources.

Revenue losses since January 2001

(In Millions of Dollars)



Improving the business climate

We took the first steps in a long-term effort to improve Washington's business climate. This year's progress includes:

- **Unemployment insurance tax equity:** More equitable tax rates will save businesses \$157 million over the next three years, without harming unemployed workers.
- **Permitting reform:** An Office of Permit Assistance will help businesses get through permitting processes faster and easier.
- **Electronic filing:** Lawmakers enacted my proposal to greatly expand the types of legal documents that can be filed electronically, which will reduce paper-work and travel costs.
- **Revitalization funding:** a permanent, stable source of funding for the Community Economic Revitalization Board will help communities make infrastructure improvements that are needed to attract businesses and jobs.

These are only first steps. Washington needs a long-term effort to make our business climate truly competitive. Please let me know if you have suggestions.

Helping parents combat Internet pornography

Several Kitsap and Pierce County parents asked me to help them protect their children against accessing internet pornography at local libraries. I worked with the Washington Library Association (WLA) to promote parents' rights and choices. If a parent tells a library they want their children to only use filtered computers, the library should see that it happens.

I'm pleased to say our effort has been extremely successful. We still have a ways to go, even with some local libraries. But according to the WLA at least 4.1 million Washington State residents now live in communities that have a library with a parental choice policy. That is terrific progress! This is also a great example of how suggestions from local citizens can make a positive difference for everyone.

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